

Chapel Talk
Craig Daugherty
Father of Dana, class of 2006
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A Sermon on Finding Hope

Text: Luke 19: 1-10

Before I discuss our message today, here are the points I would like for you to keep in mind from the Zacchaeus story:

1. Zacchaeus hope was in a Messiah. He thought that Jesus might be the Messiah who would free his people from the oppression of the Romans. He thought Jesus could help them and him personally.
2. Zacchaeus was wealthy, but tax collectors were known for their extortion. He got rich by cheating his fellow countryman. His fellow Jews hated him. Zacchaeus probably didn't feel good about himself.
3. Zacchaeus was surprised that Jesus took notice of him. He wanted a relationship with him so badly that he was willing to make amends for all his wrongs.
4. Jesus accepted Zacchaeus and not only gave him hope, but brought salvation and restoration to his soul.

I'm delighted to be with you today. For my wife and I, as it is for many of you, this is an opportunity not just to support our daughter Dana, who is a form 5 student. It is also an opportunity for family reunion in a wonderful fall setting-with this glorious blaze of colors, so different than the recent hurricane experiences we have had in Orlando, Florida where we are from. As mentioned in my introduction, I am in seminary and I work for Wycliffe Bible Translators. It is a faith based linguistic organization. We are involved in creating written languages for unreached people groups in the world without one. Does anyone know how many languages there are in the world today? 100? 600? How about 1000? There are actually over 6000 spoken/written languages in the world today, separate and distinct, spoken by over 10,000 people groups. My organization has been a part of providing a written language for over 3000 of these languages, and translating a message of hope into the first written language for almost 6000 of these people groups.

Today's lesson is on finding hope. You have had two plays now at St. Andrew's that provided a focus on hope. In the play last night, the Laramie project, one of the residents referred to hope and spelled it out as something they needed in the midst of their tragedy. In the story of Joseph and the amazing Technicolor dream coat in February, one of the scenes was Joseph being thrown into prison. While he was there dejected and in despair, the narrator reaches out to him through the bars of the prison and says, "take care Joseph, don't lose your hope. I

thought to myself, “What wonderful insight! Hope from God could help him keep his dream in sight.”

He certainly had every reason to lose hope. In the Bible story, Joseph had been a slave and/or in prison for almost 30 years, after being sold into slavery by his brothers. Based on the story of Zacchaeus today that I would like for you to keep in mind, and the notion of hope expressed in these two plays, as well as two stories I will share with you, I would like to suggest three places we find Hope:

1. In people/relationships, this is the lesson of friends, loved ones and family. It was spelled out by the resident of Laramie in your school play and was found in the solidarity of their vigils and responses to Matthew Shepard’s death
2. In dreams/goals, this is the lesson of many celebrated athletes and Olympians whose story I will share with you today.
3. I believe you may find that long-lasting hope is only found in faith in a personal religious experience, similar to Zacchaeus in our story. This is what also helped Joseph to survive in the other play/Bible story I mentioned, and what helps many of us survive and live passionately today regardless of your personal religious affiliation, whether it is Jewish, Islam or something else.

This brings up a need to distinguish between hope and faith. For purposes of our message today, when you think of hope, think of expectation. When you think of faith, think of promise; think of truth. Now let’s refer back to our summary earlier in the story of Zacchaeus and Jesus to expand on our points.

Point One, Finding Hope in People.

Now Zacchaeus heard stories about Jesus, and like many hoped that he was the long-awaited Messiah spoken of. Someone who would free Israel from the rule and dominance of the Romans. You can imagine his surprise when Jesus would take notice of someone like himself. Zacchaeus was someone who was basically considered to be a crook and a real low-life. However, Jesus was someone who had given him hope and let him know he was cared for and worth spending time with. Jesus was known for caring for those in need and for those rejected by society. Zacchaeus was probably depressed and needed hope.

Most of us do feel this way at some point or another. Experts tell us that at some point in our lives we all feel depressed. But what we like to do is wear masks so no one can see that we are hurting. In particular, depression is more common than you think among teens. Let me share with you a few statistics on teen depression: (Judy Shepps Battle, Report on Depression-<http://www.about-teen-depression.com/depression-statistics.html>)

Studies indicate that one in five may have some sort of mental, behavioral, or emotional problem, and that one in ten may have a serious emotional problem. One in eight may suffer from depression. Of all these struggling with emotional and behavioral problems, a mere 30% receive any sort of intervention or treatment. The other 70% simply struggle through the pain of mental illness or emotional turmoil, doing their best to make it to adulthood.

The statistics on adults are not that much better and even more sobering. Experts tell us, "Depression is one of the greatest problems and killers of our time... Depression will be the second largest killer after heart disease-overtaking obesity, by 2020 -- (By Bob Murray, PhD and Alicia Fortinberry, MS - http://www.upliftprogram.com/depression_stats.html#stat)

This can all be very serious, and very depressing, which is what happens when we lose hope. This reminds me of the story of a teen-age student who could be from any high school in the U.S. including St. Andrews:

She was a high school student with a poor self-image and felt as if no one really cared. She felt as if her life really didn't matter at all. Let's call her, Amy; but she could be anyone. One day she was cleaning out her locker, when suddenly everything just fell out. (Have any of you ever had lockers like this?) She was wondering how she would be able to manage all of these things, books sprawled across the floor, when another teenager happened to come by. We'll call her Joy. Joy asked Amy if she needed help. Amy didn't know what to say, to which Joy simply picked up several of her books and other things and began walking down the hallway. Amy quickly indicated that she was taking these things home to which Joy replied that she would help her.

They talked about general things on the way, school, cheerleading, grades and it just happened that they were passing by Joy's home. Joy invited Amy inside for a brief snack. Reluctantly, Amy accepted. She ended up staying for dinner and a wonderful friendship developed between the two of them over the next two years until graduation.

Graduation day was a wonderful occasion, full of happiness for both Amy and Joy. However, at the conclusion of the day, when Amy and Joy were alone, Amy broke down, sobbing intensely with many tears. Joy could not possibly imagine what was wrong, so she asked. Amy surprisingly replied, "These are tears of joy. This day would not have been possible without you. I was crying because I thought about what would have happened if you had not shown up at my locker that day. You see, I was clearing out my locker that day because I had planned to kill myself. No one has ever noticed me, but you

showed me someone cared, and now I have a life to live." Amy found hope in Joy. You see you can find hope in a relationship if someone cares. Amy did, and Zacchaeus did.

What have you discovered? Is there hope in the relationships that have been a source of encouragement for you here at St. Andrews? Parents are you a source of hope and encouragement for your children? This is important. More than anything else, I hope I have been that way for Dana. I have had opportunities to travel all over the world, and participate in many high-level meetings, but there's nothing better I enjoy and almost no sacrifice I would not make to spend the day or have a date with my daughter Dana. There are times I just have to take a timeout, because if you want to provide hope, there's no substitute for being there. Don't some of you parents feel that way? Dads, don't some of you feel that way?

You see, besides miracles of physical healing, by providing hope Jesus provided emotional healing and restoration. As parents we can do the same. Joy did not realize that Amy was depressed or suicidal, but as Parents today there are signs of hopelessness and depression we should be aware of.

Point 2, Finding Hope in Dreams

As we mentioned earlier hope can also be found in the dreams and goals we have. This brings us to the story of Lance Armstrong who most of you are familiar with. He is a National and world champion cyclist, two time Olympian, 5-time winner of the Tour De France, and cancer survivor. The cancer was severe, spreading throughout his body, lungs, abdomen, and up to his brain. Armstrong required brain surgery and underwent four rounds of chemotherapy so powerful that the chemicals destroyed his musculature and caused permanent kidney damage; in the final treatments, the chemicals left burns on his skin from the inside out. His Oncologist, Nichols, described Armstrong as the "most willful person I have ever met." And, he said, "he wasn't willing to die." Armstrong did recover, but his first attempts to return to competition ended in exhaustion and depression. Yes Armstrong was depressed, but he hadn't lost his hope. His comeback wasn't because he was stronger than others, but more determined, and trained more than his competitors. That's what his coach said. His goals gave him hope and no one could convince him his career was over. Has anyone ever told you that you could not do something? How did you respond and why? Langston Hughes, a Harlem Renaissance poet, said, "Hold fast to dreams for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly..."

Dreams and goals can be powerful drivers for hope. With goals like these some of you will become doctors, lawyers, politicians, and celebrities. However, sometimes that is not enough. Many celebrities and super athletes commit suicide after they reach their goals. Mr. Roach questioned yesterday the value of getting into the highest ranked colleges if there's the possibility of being dysfunctional and depression in the end.

Even for Lance Armstrong, goals and winning were not enough. He said, “The truth is, if you asked me to choose between winning the TdF and cancer, I would choose cancer. Odd as it sounds, I would rather have the title of cancer survivor than winner of the Tour, because of what it has done for me as a human being, a man, a husband, a son and a father.” Lance wanted something more lasting that he could share. Because he is a cancer survivor, he now promotes hope through the “Live Strong” bracelets that many of you wear. These are serving and sharing values we want to instill in students at St. Andrews.

Point 3, Finding Hope in Faith

What makes faith such a powerful and lasting driver of hope? It is because it not only heals, but it restores as we said earlier. In the Zacchaeus story, Jesus said for the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost. The question becomes, what did we lose? What made things so hopeless that we would be regarded as lost? It was a disconnection with a creator God who is the ultimate source of all hope. It was something so powerful that when Zacchaeus re-discovered hope in a relationship with Jesus, based on a faith in a personal religious experience, he would be willing to make amends for all financial wrongs he had ever done. He was so impacted he gave half of his wealth to the poor. Would you be willing to do this? This is the message of restoration that Zacchaeus understood, and this is the message of restorative hope that is available to us today as a basis for long-lasting hope.

So, we've seen how hope could be found in relationships, like the case of Amy and joy; in dreams and goals like Lance Armstrong, and finally how faith can have an impact for lasting hope. Why is all of this important? The lives of your friends, relatives, and children are at stake. Hope can heal and remove the depression and hopelessness. If you know someone who needs some, help them find it. If you have it, make sure you share it. Zacchaeus found it. It saved his life and restored his soul. He then shared it with others. It can restore your soul also if you care to accept this, when found in faith in a personal religious experience. For Zacchaeus, it was faith in Jesus. That's the way it was for me also. That's what the real message of hope in the Bible is all about.

Thank you.